January 1993

approach

The Naval Aviation Safety Review

Aviators vs Controllors...
Who's in Control? Page 2

Crew Coordination and Ejection...
Who Pulls? Page 8

Aviators and Controllers:

Whose *Fault* Is It Anyway?

Peter Mersky

They just don't get any respect. Air traffic controllers, that is. Aviators constantly blame problems on controllers and take credit for getting themselves out of trouble — trouble they probably got themselves into.

Many *Approach* stories include comments such as "The tower suggested we turn to a heading of 270," "The controller turned us into traffic" or "Why didn't they call that VFR traffic at three o'clock?"

I'd bet every aviator has made a similar statement. If you have, chances are you were wrong, not the controller. Controllers have the big screen TV; you're looking out a little window. More often than not controllers know something you don't.

They also have regulations on their side. There are no military instructions that override the controllers authority. When you fly in controlled airspace, airfields, warning areas, jet routes or airways, you must follow the controller's instructions.

Correction:

The author of "Call Sign: Boom Boom" (Nov 92) was incorrectly printed as Lt. Darren M. Medeirous. The actual author was Lt. Rob Hallawell. We apologize for the error.

A note to authors: please ensure that your full name is printed on your submissions so we can give you credit.

Ed.

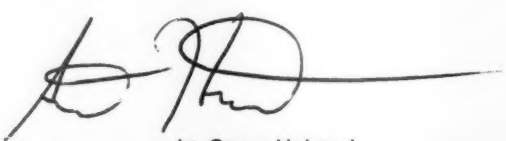
The only time you may deviate from instructions is in an emergency. At that point you must tell the controller your intentions and declare an emergency. After the flight, fill out the paperwork.

This month we've got several stories about misunderstandings between aviators and controllers. Since they were written by aviators, the stories have a slant.

Why don't more controllers tell me hair-raising stories about aviators instead of the other way around? Maybe it's because aviators like to hear themselves talk. It's more likely controllers don't think aviators would listen.

Well controllers, here's your chance. I've got an AC Master Chief giving me a hard time for letting aviators walk all over his fellow ATC bubbas (he gets his shots on page 3). If you write a good story, I'll print it. Don't just whine; have real stories about those bozo aviators messing up your airspace. Whatever you do, don't cut them any slack.

If you don't write, I'll assume that our aviators always do it right.



Lt. Steve Halsted

inside **approach** Volume 38, Number 1 January 1993

Break, Now! 2
By Lt. Mark C. Workman

Who's Trying to Kill Whom? 3
By ACCM (AW) Richard C. Foster

Traffic in the Grove 5
By Lt. Roberta C. Belesimo

Beyond the "X" 6
By LCdr. J.A. Crabbe

But, Skipper, We Brought Your Plane Back! 7
By Lt. Kevin P. Stauff

Who Pulls First? 8
By Lt. Michael Stewart

When Do I Eject? 10
By Cdr. John H. Christman

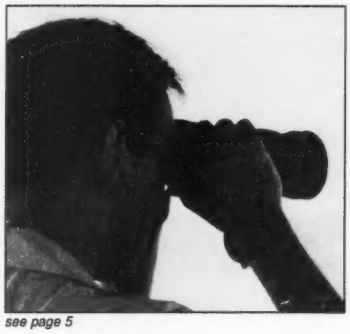
Red! What a Horrible Color 12
By Lt. Daniel Doherty

Two 360s Don't Make a Right 14
By Lt. Jeff Bohler

Mr. Fixit, Where Are You? 16
By Ltjg. Elliot Laramie

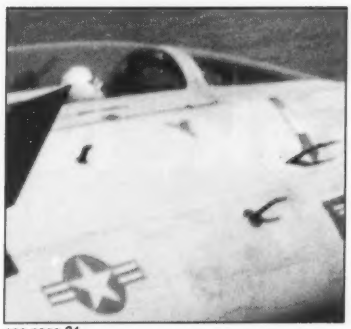
I'm Famous 17
By LCdr. H.F. Bishop

My El Centro Excursion 18
By Ltjg. Dave Waterman



see page 5

see page 16



see page 24

see page 28

"I Thought You Had the Controls" 20
By Lt. David D. Diamond

Small FOD, Big Problem 21
By Lt. Michael Ciardello

"Roger That Emergency; You're No. 4..." 22
By Lt. Bob Wetzel

"Paddles, No AOA!" 24
By LCdr. Ward Carroll

Rendezvous by Braille 28
By Lt. Jerry Stokes

Push! Push! Descend! Descend! 30
By Lt. Paul Lumsden

Nose Low, Accelerating? 32
By Lt. Tom Schrantz

Safety Article? What's There To Write About? IBC
By Lt. Reid D. Carr

DEPARTMENTS

Bravo Zulu 27

On the cover: An E-2C of VAW-112.

(Photo by Cdr. Joe Towers)

● Effective 1 January 1993, the Naval Safety Center will collect and report mishap data on a fiscal-year vice calendar-year basis.

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Break, Now!

By Lt. Mark C. Workman

CAVU with a commander's moon, and we were returning in our Battle Hummer from a good-deal cross-country. I have to admit, looking back, my guard was down. We had a seasoned crew aboard (more 8,000 hours between the five crewmembers), the back end had been vigilantly calling traffic for us the entire trip (my copilot and I were calling "tallies" at 10, even 20 miles), and now homeplate was in sight at 100 miles.

Since neither the copilot nor myself were particularly keen on honing our instrument skills at this point, we gleefully accepted radar vectors to the initial. Our switch from Approach to Tower put us just inside the three-mile initial, which my copilot then called, and which Approach acknowledged. Our next transmission, however, proved to be a little more eventful.

"Tower, 601, numbers for the break."

"Roger, 601, over the numbers break right. You have traffic at your one o'clock at 1,500 feet, an H-53!"

Whoa, time out! I quickly reviewed the facts: me in a Hummer, right break, an H-53 at one, now two o'clock, co-altitude... hmmm? Was I missing something? My copilot's puzzled face told me I wasn't!

The helo was now within a half-mile of us and the strange blinking lights quickly filled our windscreen.

"Why is he at break altitude?" I asked the tower. I half expected an illogical answer, and got one.

"601, break now!"

My copilot and I quickly agreed that on a scale of good to bad, this was definitely bad. There was just no way I was going to break belly-up to a helo. We weren't supposed to break left because of a residential area on that

part of the base, and straight ahead seemed a little too close for comfort. We did not have a warm and fuzzy feeling about the helo's direction of flight.

As an E-2 pilot, you rarely get the opportunity to do pop-up breaks (especially at night), but it seemed like the thing to do at the time. I rolled into the break as I pulled up to 2,000 feet, keeping the helo squarely planted at the center of my copilot's side window. Once clear of our traffic, we finished an otherwise normal recovery. Naturally I had to work off a high fast start, but after two cruises I had plenty of practice.

As my copilot and I counted the gray hairs on each other's head in the ready room, we talked about what happened. A beautiful VFR night had almost turned into a fireball! The crew in the back end, who missed out on the front- row view of the show, was quickly gaining an appreciation for exactly how close we came to a midair.

After a few phone calls and a good night's rest, we arranged a meeting with ATC. Following an exchange of pleasantries, we learned some "fun facts." First, we and the controllers present had different interpretations of certain ATC instructions. To the controllers, "Break over the numbers" meant exactly that, an imperative verbal directive to break at the downwind numbers. This was news to us (and our squadron, as well as dozens of other tailhook aviators whom we informally polled).

I explained our interpretation—that unless an aviator was feeling particularly "gamey," breaking at the numbers was not the norm. Such a clearance simply offered the opportunity, but the pilot could break anywhere beyond that, with proper interval, up to the upwind numbers. After that, a courtesy call or a "departing and reentering" call would be in order. They simply stared in disbelief.

Finally, with both break and IFR traffic operating at 1,500 feet, conflicts are bound to arise. Whenever possible, traffic should be separated by course rules rather than simply "see and avoid." ◀

Lt. Workman was an E-2C pilot with VAW-122. He is now an instructor with VT-4.

Who's Trying to Kill Whom?

By ACCM (AW) Richard C. Foster

"Assume everyone else is trying to kill you."
"Trust no one."

As the air traffic control analyst for the Naval Safety Center, I review stories submitted to *Approach* that deal with ATC. I often run across these two statements in articles. They seem to be a creed for aviators. Although aviators may not realize it, they must trust many people, ATC included, in order to complete their mission.

Three recent stories accuse air traffic controllers of being less than competent and unworthy of trust. What pilots don't know—but think they do know about air traffic control—can kill them. Or worse, someone else.

There seems to be a chasm between some aviators' understanding of ATC rules and what those rules really mean. Knowing the rules in the airspace that you regularly fly in is vital. The air station involved in one article I reviewed lies beneath an ARSA (Class C airspace) shelf that has a base altitude of 2,000 feet AGL. It also has a minimum vectoring altitude of 2,100 feet MSL used to keep aircraft within the ARSA. The pilot in the article climbed to 2,000 feet (to avoid traffic he believed the controller was turning him into) without ATC approval. He may have violated FAR 91.130; more importantly however, he could have caused a midair collision.

Aviators and controllers also interpret instructions differently. What does the phrase "Over the numbers break right" mean to you? To a pilot in one story it means, "Such a clearance simply offered the opportunity (to break at the numbers), but the pilot could break anywhere beyond that, with proper interval, up to the upwind numbers. After that, a courtesy call or a departing and reentering call would be in order."

That pilot is mistaken; that instruction provides no option of where and when to break. When ATC specifies a break location, that is exactly where the pilot is expected to break. If he is unable to comply, he is required to tell the controller so another course of action can be determined.

As stated in FAA Handbook 7110.65, "If ATC issues a clearance that would cause a pilot to deviate from a rule or regulation or in the pilot's opinion, would place the aircraft in jeopardy, **it is the pilot's responsibility to request an amended clearance.**" FAR 91.123(b) says, "Except in an emergency, no person may operate an aircraft contrary to an ATC instruction in an area in which air traffic control is exercised."

Peter Mersky

ATC personnel prefer to separate traffic, IFR or VFR, by course rules. However, airspace constraints and noise-abatement requirements sometimes prevent establishing procedures that deconflict traffic. When restrictions prevent ATC from incorporating new course rules the tower local controller is responsible for deconflicting aircraft. Course rules that conflict become more evident when pilots ignore ATC instructions. As stated in FAA Handbook 7110.65, "When an overhead pattern could extend into the path of a departing or a missed approach aircraft, timely and positive controller action is required to prevent a conflict."

In yet another story a pilot says, "The aircraft commander notified the tower that we would be extending off the 180." Later in the article the tower issues a waveoff contrary to the aircraft commander's desired direction. "The aircraft commander advised Tower that we would wave off to the east, down the left side of the runway."

If pilots are allowed to believe they can simply tell controllers what they are going to do in an ATA, then maybe we should turn off the frequencies and go home. I am confident that after the Class-A mishap rate began to increase, we controllers would be invited back to work.

In my 36-month tenure at the Naval Safety Center, there have been 188 Class-A aircraft mishaps. Of those 188, three listed Navy air traffic controllers as causal factors. One is too many, but those three mean that 1.6 percent of the time a Navy controller contributes to a mishap, which hardly seems to be a major hazard.

One thing all these incidents have in common is that they apparently were not detailed in hazard reports. If you don't use the hazard reporting system or at least visit the Air Traffic Control Facility Officer after an incident, you ensure that the records required to recreate the incident or defend the air traffic controller will be destroyed.

Months later, it is hard to describe an incident from memory for an article in *Approach* or for ready room discussion. Often these stories digress into "I was sure the controller was trying to kill me" stories.

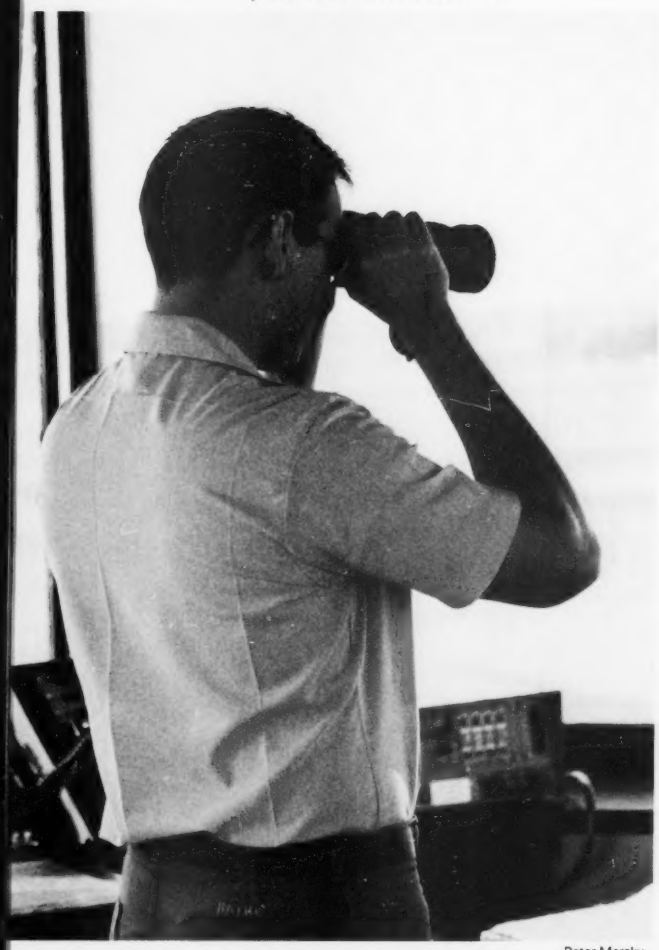
If you feel that controllers contributed to a dangerous situation it is vital that you report the incident. Verbatim terminology in transcript form is necessary to recreate a scenario. ATC allows 15 days for a pilot to review or obtain an official transcript following an incident. Only after you have completed those steps can an accurate conclusion be drawn as to who was at fault.

Controllers are not perfect; however, we have a better vantage point from which to get the big picture and to formulate a plan to safely launch and recover aircraft. We do not boresight on one aircraft until it exits the runway after landing rollout. We see many things that you aren't aware of.

I will not lose sleep when an aviator does a Sierra Hotel maneuver and ends up in a smoking hole because he violated ATC instructions or Federal Aviation Regulations. ◄

Traffic in the Groove

By Lt. Roberta C. Belesimo



Peter Mersky

Since we were short of C-9B crew chiefs, I was the extra pilot on this training flight, and I was selected to perform crew chief duties (with the promise of a couple of touch-and-goes at the end of the hop).

The first touch-and-go at home field completed all the syllabus requirements for the pilot under instruction. On downwind, we swapped seats. I climbed into the right seat and started setting up for a base leg while the aircraft commander strapped in on the left. He told the tower that we would be extending off the 180. The controller acknowledged and told us that we were No. 1, with another aircraft on a six-mile final. I scrambled to get the aircraft set up, calling for the gear and the before-landing checklist. Then, I started an approach turn for runway 10.

Just past the 90, on a left base, we saw traffic. A 727 was high on a straight-in approach, much too close for both of us to continue safely. The 727 started a waveoff but didn't call the tower. I waved off, too, at the direction of the aircraft commander. Tower instructed us to wave off to the west, which meant a turn *into* the traffic. I leveled our wings, intending to cross under the 727 before turning in its direction.

The AC advised the tower that we would wave off to the east, down the left side of the runway. I began the turn, awaiting a response from the tower and keeping our traffic in sight.

An overshooting crosswind and the tower's waveoff instructions contributed to an overshoot; the AC took control and completed the waveoff, passing to the right of the duty runway at 500 feet because we had lost sight of the 727 above us.

The 727 crew failed to communicate with the tower. Although they appeared to be taking a waveoff, they didn't tell anyone. If we had known their intentions, we would have continued our approach.

The C-9B aircraft commander was intent on the waveoff down the left side of the runway, but he didn't initially communicate his intent to me and I began making the waveoff based on the tower's instructions. I didn't clarify the tower's call and initially, I maintained straight-and-level flight to keep the 727 in sight.

Don't rely too much on the controller to ensure proper landing interval. Always be thinking of a conflict with landing traffic and of what you should do in the event of a conflict. Finally, if you receive non-standard waveoff instructions, clarify them immediately.

Always communicate your intentions to the controllers and crewmembers. Inadequate crew coordination and communication continues to plague us as the most common cause of aviation mishaps. ◀

Lt. Belesimo is first-tour C-9B pilot with VR-56.

Beyond the "X"

By LCdr. J.A. Crabbe

I've heard many stories about people who backed themselves into a corner on a training hop because they were trying to get the "X". I managed to back myself into a corner long after I had the "X".

Because of a last-minute change in plans, my local instrument hop was changed to a cross-country and instrument check. We would fly the instrument check from Beeville to El Paso. We'd refuel, switch seats and I would fly from El Paso to El Centro. Simple plan, easy to do, but favorable winds complicated matters.

The flight-level winds were near zero for the first leg, so we didn't have to refuel at El Paso. In fact, I had enough fuel to make it all the way to MCAS Yuma. The new plan was even simpler than the original: after a graded instrument approach and full stop at Yuma, we'd get enough gas to hop over to El Centro. We refiled and headed west.

As the flight progressed, we continued to make gas. Coming up the initial approach fix at Yuma, I made some final fuel calculations and confirmed that we could fly the approach, execute a missed approach, and go on to El Centro, where we'd land with SOP minimum fuel for VFR.

I was proud of myself and my ability to complete the instrument check and get to El Centro in one leg. I refiled in flight for a VFR leg to Yuma to El Centro. My student flew a flawless approach to Yuma, followed with the missed approach and cleaned up. I took the controls and headed for my home away from home.

At about 30 miles out, I tried to contact Tower but kept getting Yuma Ground. After another 10 miles of checking frequency and calling El Centro Ground, I finally raised the Tower. I said I was inbound for the break and that I would be on the ground in about five minutes.

"Roger that, 525," they replied. "El Centro is NOTAM'd closed from 2200Z until 2330Z."

I looked at my watch. It was one minute before the next hour, but I had no idea what Zulu time it was.

"Roger," I said, "understand you'll be closed in one hour?"

"Negative, 525, we're closed now."

I don't think I've ever heard a worse response to a question. I glanced at my fuel and realized I didn't have enough to get back to Yuma.

"525 is emergency fuel," I said. "I don't have enough to return to Yuma. I need to land here, now!" Their reply gave me a new respect for the "E" word as they cleared me to land on arrival.

As I rolled out, after an uneventful approach, I discovered the reason for the NOTAM: the Blues were sitting patiently (yeah, right!) in the hold-short, waiting for me to clear.

The tower chief met me at Maintenance Control. He said to expect a call from the Boss of the Blues when they returned. No news flash there. I never got the call or had to explain myself to anyone but my CO. Yet the lessons I learned are still fresh in my mind.

The only thing you'll get by one-legging a normal two-leg hop are raised eyebrows. If you haven't checked NOTAMS at a field that you are refiling for in the air, have your filing agency check for you.

Don't forget about fuel. Leave enough to divert even if it's CAVU at your destination. ➤

LCdr. Crabbe flies A-6s with VA-115. He was an instructor with VT-25 at the time of this story.

Peter Mersky

But, Skipper,

We Brought Your Plane Back!

By Lt. Kevin P. Stauff

Poor crew coordination is a major cause of mishaps in multi-piloted aircraft. To successfully operate P-3s, pilots, flight engineers and crewmembers must interact smoothly. On one of my first flights as both patrol plane commander (PPC) and mission commander (MC), I got a lesson in teamwork.

The day began perfectly. We were scheduled for a noon departure on a six-hour flight tracking a friendly submarine. After takeoff, we flew to the op-area under a clear, blue Westpac sky. As is common practice in P-3s, we loitered the No. 1 engine just before descending on station. The TACCO gave us a computer point for our first sonobuoy drop. Just before the drop, a crewman yelled, "Smoke in the aircraft!"

I activated the fire bill and secured the cabin exhaust fan using NATOPS. Here's where my judgment was clouded by my zeal to impress the CO. Since his arrival, the skipper had emphasized mission accomplishment above almost everything else. I knew if I lost contact with the submarine, I'd be standing in his office explaining why.

I asked the TACCO if he could drop the buoy while the crew searched for the source of the smoke. He replied, "No problem." He and I continued the mission while the crew continued the fire bill. As luck would have it, a crewman quickly found a smoking UHF radio. We secured power to the radio, cleaned up from the fire bill, and started to think again about ASW.

I was feeling pretty good that I had just handled two problems—ASW and a possible fire—concurrently. Maybe this MC stuff wasn't so hard after all. That's when the flight engineer spoke up.

"You really blew that one, sir," he declared. I glared at him and he continued, "As soon as we activated the fire bill, you should have turned for home and restarted No.1."

My copilot jumped in. "Yeah, I agree," he said. "We should have quit the prosecution and started the engine." These were legitimate concerns, but the men were offering their suggestions a little too late.

I purposely did not turn for home as I continued inbound for the buoy drop. However, restarting the engine is something I simply overlooked. P-3s fly around for hours on three engines; it becomes natural. I went from feeling great to feeling foolish in about three seconds. I nodded my head in agreement and muttered, "Yeah, I should have restarted the engine."

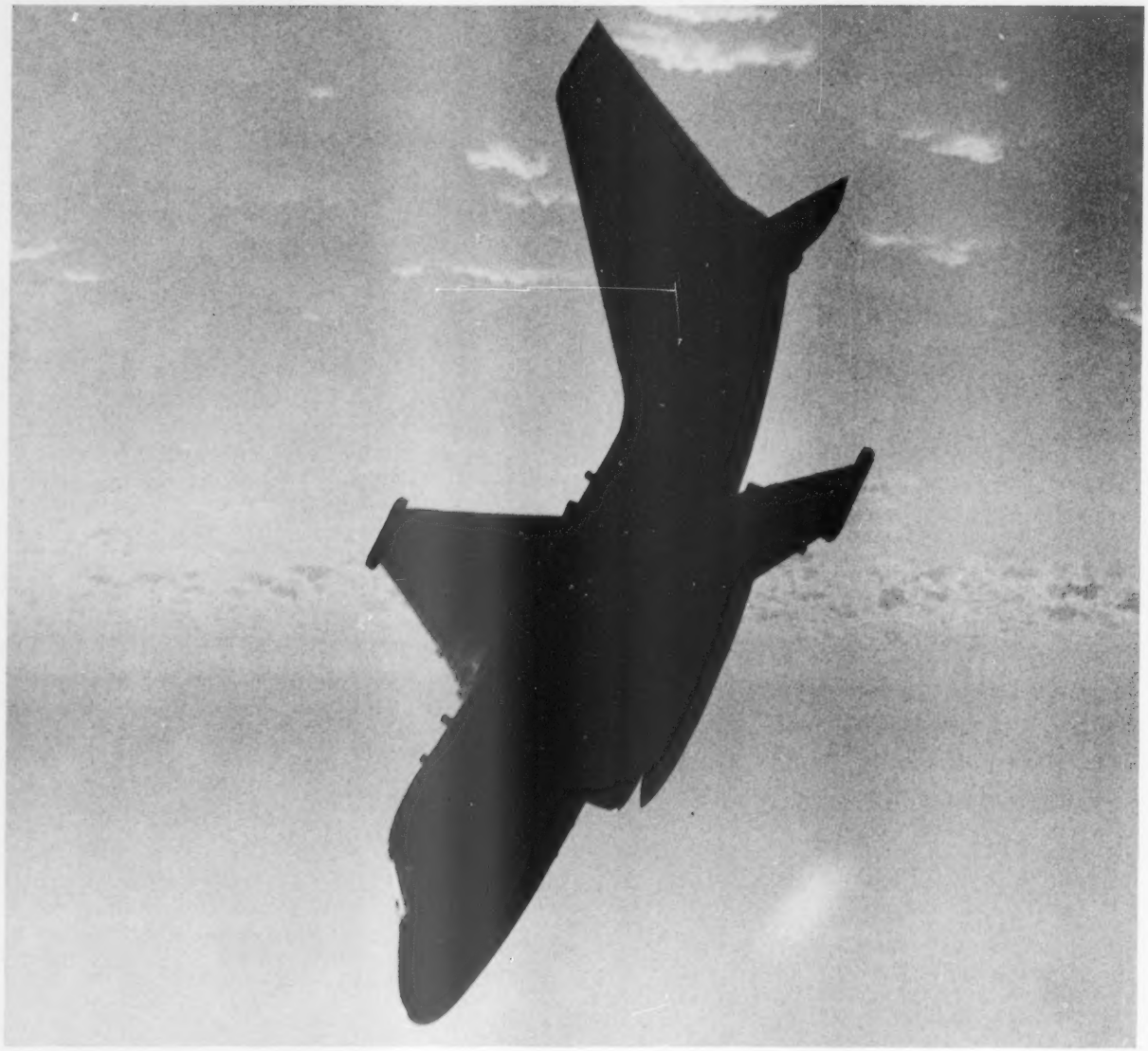
During the flight home, I replayed the incident in my mind. I felt we could handle both situations; we did. Still, that smoke could have quickly become a fire. During syllabus training, I was given this exact scenario 15-20 times. Each time I had restarted the engine. Why did I forget this time? Of even greater concern, if my crew thought I was making a mistake, why didn't they say something? What happened to teamwork? After we landed, I called the crew together and asked them those questions.

Throughout the P-3 training syllabus, we stress teamwork. That's as it should be. If you're junior in a cockpit, do you offer suggestions or are you intimidated by someone else's qualifications? If you're senior, do you solicit input? While others may not have your experience, they might have a better idea. In short, do you work as a team? It's easier explaining to the skipper how you lost contact on a submarine than explaining how you set fire to his aircraft. ◀

Lt. Stauff flies with VPU-1.

By Lt. Michael Stewart

Who Pulls First?



LCdr. Hank Stanley

After reading about a mishap where an S-3 violently departured and the aircrew was killed trying to eject, I began to wonder if the fact that the S-3 COTAC had been briefed as the crew member responsible for initiating ejection—let's call him the primary ejector—had contributed to the mishap. Specifically, is a COTAC adequately trained to assume that responsibility? I also wondered if it is a good idea to assign anyone that responsibility.

Obviously, the backseaters are in the worst position to make a valid decision about ejecting because they don't have flight instruments and they can't see very well. Normally, they will only initiate ejection if the frontseaters are incapacitated. So, the responsibility

usually falls to the frontseaters.

Many S-3 aircrews brief that the COTAC will be the primary ejector. There seem to be two schools of thought why this is done. First, the COTAC is perceived to be better able to make the ejection decision while the pilot is busy struggling to recover the aircraft, or at least keep it in the ejection envelope.

Second, as one COTAC told me, "The COTAC will be a 'voice-activated' ejector after receiving the command to eject from the pilot." Although I agree that the frontseaters should make the ejection decision, I don't necessarily agree that the COTAC is the best person to make it.

Designating the COTAC as the primary ejector relieves the pilot of the responsibility of actually pulling his own handle, possibly delaying ejection. Also, a misunderstanding between the frontseaters could cause a further delay after the pilot has determined that the aircraft is unrecoverable and is waiting for the COTAC to eject the aircrew. This practice might place the ejection responsibility in the hands of someone who may not be adequately trained to decide as quickly or as confidently as the pilot.

I tested my theory in the simulator. During back-in-the-saddle and emergency procedure hops, I induced unexpected departures during stalls. After the departure, the pilot was busy at the controls while the COTAC provided backup consisting of altitude calls, a scan of the annunciator panel and asking the pilot if he had control. When faced with an unrecoverable aircraft, the COTACs seemed to defer to the pilots. After observing this tendency in several COTACs, I wanted to see if the COTACs would delay an ejection while being influenced by the pilot to stay with an aircraft that had descended below mandatory ejection altitude.

Before the trainer, I secretly told the pilots to stay with the aircraft below ejection altitude while saying to the COTAC, "I've got it! I've got it! Stay with me!"

Many COTACs delayed the ejection until well below the mandatory ejection altitude, with some delaying it as far as 2,000 feet. They did not seem to have confidence in their ability to make a timely decision. I estimate that 90 percent of the COTACs in our squadron reacted similarly. We have some talented NFOs in our squadron and I had to wonder why. One man's reply summed it up: "I think of myself as an average, if not above-average NFO. I can tell you that I don't feel confident in making that [ejection] decision. I think we need more training in the simulator or the aircraft. It's not a question of knowing procedures, but of situational awareness. I don't have a feel for when or where to be looking in the cockpit to decide if the aircraft is recoverable."

Many of the COTACs felt that pilots have an advantage in determining if the aircraft is recoverable because they have the controls and are more in tune with it. COTACs have to rely mainly on visual cues which, with proper training, is not necessarily a problem.

During flight training, student jet pilots receive out-of-controlled-flight (OOCF) training in the T-2, spins in the T-34 and unusual attitudes in all the aircraft they fly. Throughout these training flights, the students are taught how to recognize the departures. They are required to tell the instructor about the status of the recovery sequence. Besides gaining a healthy respect for the violence of departures (especially the inverted spin), most pilots walk away from their training with good situational awareness and a solid understanding of recovery techniques after going through 15-18 violent departures.

During flight training, NFOs experience spins in T-34s, and unusual attitudes and simulators in the T-2. In the Over-Water Jet Navigator syllabus, NFOs see more unusual attitudes and post-stall gyrations in the S-3. I would argue, however, that this training is not sufficiently realistic.

Do NFOs really need training in OOCF procedures? Can't pilots take responsibility for being the primary ejectors? Are S-3s going to be in situations that require all the aircrew to be well-versed in all types of recoveries?

The quick fix to resolve the primary ejector problem would be to stop briefing the NFO as the designated ejector. However, if briefed that way, at least insist that the pilot pull his handle immediately after giving the command to eject. Realistically, because the VS community will be increasingly exposed to hostile environments, there should be at least OOCF simulators, if not dedicated OOCFs, to teach aircrew coordination after a departure. We have procedures for OOCF recovery, but we must adequately discuss the critical part of this equation, which is aircrew coordination. Every crewmember of a multiplace aircraft has responsibility for the safety of the flight. ◄

Lt. Stewart is the senior LSO and Pilot NATOPS officer for VS-29.

In response to the preceding story, we gathered data on ejections in multi-seat aircraft during the period 1977-1992. We broke the information down by who pulled the handle, if the ejection was in the envelope and how many survived.

In the S-3, F-4 and F-14, the NFO initiated ejection about twice as often as the pilot. In the EA-6B, however, the pilot almost always pulled the handle (an overwhelming 18 to 1). There were no indications that either method caused more deaths or injuries.

What the data did show was that if you eject out of the envelope, you'll probably die.

Another point raised by "Who Pulls First?" is trust. A large part of the crew concept is believing what your pilot or NFO tells you. Is testing trust in the training session fair to the person being tested? What effect does that test have on crew coordination?

Read on for an example of trust and confidence as well as a counterpoint to the discussion in "Who Pulls First?".

When Do *I* Eject?

By Cdr. John H. Christman

Except in war, there is no operational necessity that requires me to give my life for my country. In other words, when in doubt, get out! The taxpayers can always buy another airplane. But what if the corrections are in and you know that the aircraft *should* recover about 500 feet below the NATOPS threshold? Why not 1,000, 2,000 or 3,000 feet? What was that other expression—"I'd rather be dead, than look bad"? What would my friends say if the mishap investigation reveals that I did something wrong? Ultimately, who cares? Why compound one error in judgment by making another that costs you your life? Ask your spouse or family or friends if they'd prefer that you cover your mistakes with six feet of earth. So the decision becomes simple again: get out of the airplane.

I know the ejection envelope. I know when the aircraft is not capable of staying in the air long enough to reach an acceptable landing area. But my simple decision becomes difficult again when I know I'm probably going to get injured or land in hostile territory—combat, open ocean, the mountains in winter or the desert in summer.

I want to nurse my crippled aircraft as close to my rescuers as possible. I still have every intention of getting out, but not until I've exhausted all means of getting this aircraft to a benign environment.

My A-6 Intruder has two seats, but no command ejection. Ever since my first combat flight I have carried a piece of parachute cord to pull my pilot's ejection handle, if necessary, and get him out of the aircraft. I don't know if it would work. I've never had to use it and I've never talked to anyone who has. But I'm willing to try anything to keep us from riding it in, and so were the pilots I flew with.

The decision of when to eject is a personal one, and the time for aircrew to discuss it is not when you're in danger. You might run out of time or not be able to discuss it. As half of a two-man aircrew, I strongly based my decision of when to eject on my confidence in my pilot—his level of knowledge, airmanship, attitude and physical condition. As a crew we had to know what the other was thinking and what he was capable of. We had to know how the other would act and react. For the routine missions, the BNs and pilots would fly with different aircrews, but for the truly dangerous missions, they flew with one individual that they knew. It was a matter of trust, as well as of crew coordination. If I had to eject during combat, I wouldn't have been surprised; I would have expected it. Despite all of my discussions about ejecting, I was surprised when I finally had to face the ejection decision—surprised because it didn't come in

combat. It came during a dependents' day cruise.

While the ship searched for a hole in the deteriorating weather, we launched fighters, bombers and tankers for a firepower demonstration. It soon became obvious that the weather would not cooperate and everyone was a bingo to the beach—everyone except the tanker. As the most experienced aircrew, we were told to bring it back aboard so the folks could see at least one landing. Most of those people will never know what a spectacle they almost saw.

Peter Mersky

Our first pass could best be described as a low approach. The first time either of us saw the ship we were abeam the island. The only thing visible above the cloud deck was the mast and the slowly rotating radar antennae. On our second pass we tried to stay in the 50-foot layer between the overcast cloud bases and the water. I looked outside the cockpit for the wake and ultimately the carrier, while my pilot flew an unwavering intercept on the ship. I called the wake in sight, and we corrected to intercept the imaginary extension of the centerline. Before either of us could say anything, the stern appeared out of the gloom; we were looking up at the rounddown.

The engines were already spooling up and we were climbing. I watched the meatball climb from clara, through a red ball, and up to slightly high. OK so far. Power was coming off to stop the ascent—then back on to catch it in the middle. Then a little off to begin the descent. From out of nowhere the ball plummeted toward the bottom of the lens.

We had talked about everything we should expect while we prepared for this pass—everything except the burble, which was now pushing us down toward the water. There was no question in my mind; we were clearly within the NATOPS parameters for ejection, but I waited. Right, wrong, or indifferent, I waited. I waited because the aircraft was still flying. I waited because my pilot hadn't said that he did not have control. I waited because I knew in my mind that had I ejected at that moment, my pilot would have been so distracted by the ejection that he would have struck the fantail.

Somehow, we made it over the rounddown for the longest taxi-1-wire I have ever seen. Everyone from the bridge to the cockpit was so stunned that we were instructed just to shut it down in place at the end of the rollout. We'd worry about moving the plane and retracting the arresting wire later.

The ejection decision is based on many factors—not the least of which are trust and communication. In multiplace aircraft, I do not think there is a ironclad right or wrong answer about who should initiate ejection.

When I decide that my pilot is no longer able to control the aircraft and that the aircraft cannot be recovered in the space available, then and only then will I eject. If someone ever tried to test me on that to see what I would do, or how long I was willing to trust them and stay with the aircraft, that would be the last time we ever flew together, even in a trainer. Trust me. ◀

Cdr. Christman flew A-6s in Vietnam, Grenada and Lebanon. He recently reported to the Naval Safety Center as head of the Media and Education Support Department.

Thanks to Dana Williamson of the Naval Safety Center's Statistics and Mathematics Department for gathering and organizing the huge amount of numbers for our introduction.

RED!

What a Horrible Color.

By Lt. Daniel Doherty

We were too far out in the Atlantic to see the Carolina-blue shoreline. I was four days into my first fleet CQ-REFTRA det, and itching to get off the boat. During CQ I was lucky enough to be the first to finish. I was summarily rewarded by being hot-switched out of my jet and left on the boat to watch everyone else bounce for the next three days.

Now that I had become thoroughly bored and frustrated with shoe-life, I was excited about my first fleet REFTRA strike, even though it meant a night cat into the goo. The brief was thorough; we all had a comfortable idea of what was (supposed to be) in store for us. But, I misplaced my kneeboard checklists and since we were late, I decided to go without. ECMO 1 and ECMO 2 broke their long time habit of bringing their wallets with them. ECMO 3 was an old salt, and as far as we know, he didn't forget anything.

...A TREMENDOUS BLOOD-RED RECTANGLE "L FIRE" FLASHED IN MY FACE!

The flight deck was dark and hectic during cyclic ops. We all made our preflights as quickly as possible, remembering CAG's recent warning to doublecheck the deck for FOD. We didn't find any and manned up.

Without my checklists, I started feeling a little behind the power curve, but still no problem. ECMO 1 fell behind when the SINS data fouled and we degraded to a manual CV alignment. All this happening on the boat at night made us feel uneasy.

Up to the cat and boom! Out into the goo—at least I was airborne and my gyros were starting to cage again. Shortly after cleaning up and getting away from the water, I heard those infamous words from ECMO 3: "I don't mean to alarm anyone, but could you check the engines?" ECMO 3 sits right on top of the port engine and was feeling abnormal vibrations.

In the front cockpit the vibrations were less noticeable, but still there. With a second inquiry from the back, and no obvious indications of engine trouble on the instruments, I cycled the throttles plus or minus five percent. The vibration didn't change, the tapes moved fine, and then... a tremendous blood-red rectangle "L FIRE" flashed in my face! I looked down to see my hands mindlessly running through the immediate-action procedures for shutting down the left engine. Everyone gripped their ejection handles, anxiously waiting for any secondary indications.

Fortunately, there were none. We broke out the

checklists and declared an emergency. We double checked all procedures and the Air Boss decided not to foul the deck. Off we went to MCAS Cherry Point.

On the hand-off, ECMO 1 started getting saturated with checklists and switching up the multiple freqs the controllers were trying to pass us through. Then ECMO 3 jumped in to reiterate that we were in an emergency status and were switching to the MCAS approach frequency. The controller calmly fed us the right information at the right time leading to an uneventful single-engine landing. After taxiing to the MCAS line, we shut down and kissed mother earth.

The next day, troubleshooters looked at our Prowler and borescoped the compressor blades—to no avail. Having just returned from the great war, they were still infected with the can-do, get-the-bird-off-the-deck attitude. They suggested I light off the port engine to see exactly what was wrong. Not a good idea. They hadn't felt the vibration in flight, and I didn't fly 100 miles to relight a bad engine. We politely declined the invitation until our maintenance det arrived to reveal that we actually shot a turbine blade into the engine wall. It was embedded at the 7 o'clock position. If it had gone through at the 2 or 5 o'clock position, we could have had severe failures and lost the jet.

Don't let anyone push you around with your jet. Take charge of the situation; you're the one with the emergency and you deserve and need priority handling. This applies on the deck as well: don't let anyone tell you to do something that's not kosher.

Remember your old instructors in the training command and FRS. You used to whisper sweet nothings about them under your breath. Well, they taught you the skills that are vital for keeping a wounded bird in flight, so keep practicing them until they become second nature.

Don't forget to pack survival gear (or your wallet) for the most common contingency: diverting to an unfamiliar airfield. Your good looks and charm might buy you a cup of coffee, but probably not a room. ◀

Lt. Doherty is a first-tour EA-6B pilot with VAQ-140.

Two 360s Don't Make a Right

By Lt. Jeff Bohler

We were RTB after a better-than-average NATOPS check. The flight had been great, we had a check in every block and the crew coordination was smooth as could be. All we had to do was bag a couple touch-and-goes and call it a day.

ATIS was calling the weather marginal VMC back at homeplate. When we checked in with Approach, we asked for and received vectors to the overhead. A few minutes later, we broke over the numbers and entered the low touch-and-go pattern at 600 feet. After the first two landings Tower directed us to extend upwind for inbound GCA traffic. I rogered the call and confirmed with the pilot. This is the point where the old links in the chain started hooking up.

The pilot started his turn before the upwind numbers, about the same place we had turned on the other trips around the pattern. I noticed this but chose to say nothing. The pilot was recently back from the fleet, had completed his IUT syllabus, was a great stick and a hell of a nice guy. I figured he knew what he was doing and decided I was just sweating the small stuff. I was still learning my job as an NFO: to fly the aircraft without touching the stick. Besides, extending would've only added 12 seconds more or less to our time to the abeam position.

While on downwind and going through the checklist, I noticed that we were working at 500-550 feet to stay out of clouds. I was wondering if Tower would tell us to full stop on the next pass.

When I made the abeam call, the tower controller replied, "Cleared for touch-and-go. Number two following GCA traffic at two miles. "Two miles," I said, "Do you have them?"

"No, not yet" said the pilot. Well, we couldn't very well start our turn untill we saw our traffic. We extended off the 180 looking for our traffic. At this point, we added another link. The pilot, I guess flying to where he was looking, started angling in a little. Again, I remained silent. I was definitely uncomfortable and it wasn't the place I would have flown. Tower called asking if we had the GCA traffic in sight?

The pilot answered "Yeah, I got 'em."

"Where?" I asked, "I still don't see them."

"They just flew behind that little cloud down there," he replied.

"OK, as long as you've got them."

I called the tower. "Traffic in sight." My pilot turned inbound.

Since we had angled in, the pilot had to put a pretty good turn on the plane to avoid overflying a local hotel, whose management was not forgiving of overflights. Out of habit I looked up the inbound path to check for other traffic that Tower might have forgotten to tell us about. I found traffic all right—at our two o'clock, low.

I called the traffic and the pilot banked the plane back to the right to move behind the inbound traffic. The net effect of the initial angling and the fake turn off at the 180 followed by a turn reversal was to put us on glideslope, on airspeed, but 180 degrees out —a very nice place to meet inbound traffic.

Things started happening very, very fast. If it sounds confusing, it was. Tower called the traffic off our nose. They suggested a left 360 to allow for interval, which would have put us right over the hotel. The pilot countered with a right 360. I concurred and told the tower of our intentions. The pilot's plan (I think) was to do a right 270 and put the aircraft at the 90. No big deal. What happened was that the pilot went to MRT on the power while we made the turn to keep the AOA under control. This caused our turn radius to be much larger than we intended.

I backed him up on the altitude and airspeed until I saw a helo out of the corner of my eye. Have you ever looked down through the rotating blades of a helicopter? A fascinating sight, I assure you. We were at 450 feet trying to remain clear of the clouds with little success. I'm not sure what altitude the helo was at, but I think we were about 150 feet above him. As a religious expletive departed my lips, I formulated my own plan.

"Let's level the wings, clean up and climb," I said, "and get a GCA". The pilot, still looking for the 90, wasn't convinced yet. We had lost sight of the airport, but the coastline was coming into view. Our informal visual-contact approach had us arriving at midfield crossing the downwind 90 degrees off heading. After another hard turn to at least align the aircraft with the downwind heading, I again put in my vote.

"Let's level the wings, clean up and climb." After a second or two of reflection, the pilot agreed. I called Tower with our position (more or less) and our intentions. Tower then switched us over to Approach Control. We put out the helmet fires and proceeded to execute a first-rate, textbook GCA. Our backseaters, who had up to this point been very quiet, finally took another breath. I'm not sure, but I think I saw one of them kiss the ground when they got out.

Back in the ready room, we talked about that 90 seconds of flight for about 10 minutes. The pilot was low-keyed and I got the impression he blew it off as no big deal. I'm not sure if this was meant to assure me or to assure himself. I certainly thought about it. Tower had not helped us by calling the weather VMC, or by trying to work us behind GCA traffic that was so far out. The pilot mentioned the confusion over whether to make a right or left 360, but I suspect Tower assumed any aircraft in that particular piece of sky would be heading inbound, not outbound. I think I was surprised when the pilot didn't just remain at altitude and follow the GCA traffic. That is what I expected. I also know that I could have been a more active participant in the afternoon's activities by getting the pilot to extend more, watch the angling, and confirm the traffic. When the weather moved in, I could have suggested a full stop even if it meant an incomplete hop. ◄

Lt. Bohler flies with VS-41.

Weather observations, such as ceiling and visibility, are provided by the Naval Oceanography Command at an NAS. Air traffic controllers are certified as tower visibility observers and report visibility when it is less than four miles. Tower personnel will normally shut down the VFR-traffic pattern when it becomes clear that they can't maintain visual contact with aircraft in the pattern.

Also, Tower directed the pilot to extend upwind to provide spacing between the two aircraft. The pilot ignored Tower's direction, resulting in a downwind extension off the 180 to follow GCA traffic.—ACCM (AW) R.C. Foster, ATC analyst for the Naval Safety Center.

Mr. Fixit, Where Are You?

By Ltjg. Elliot Laramie

My crew and I had manned up for a night ESM hop in the Persian Gulf. We were excited about flying in the area and eager to see what the Iraqis were doing. On deck the pilot noticed that the glareshield seemed a little loose. It moved a little, but seemed fine to take flying. We taxied to the starboard cat and went into tension.

Immediately as the jet started forward, the whole glareshield assembly broke loose and fell over the upper half of the pilot's instrument panel. The master caution and fire lights, which are attached to the assembly, were hanging from the wiring. As we left the deck, we had no attitude reference, AOA, airspeed, or altimeter. The pilot pulled back on the stick until he thought the plane was at the correct attitude, while we struggled to get the glareshield off the instruments. The backseat ECMOs monitored their instruments.

Once at a safe altitude, I got out a large piece of ordy tape to secure the loose glareshield. I've used it to cover failed attitude indicators, but never to put the cockpit back together. It worked fine, but now we had another problem: a push on the master press-to-test revealed that none of the fire lights were working. They had disconnected off the catapult. We turned back to the ship and prepared to come aboard on the next recovery. Finally, after trouble-shooting and pushing on them, the lights came back on. We continued on our mission.

The flight was uneventful until we arrived on final at five miles; the left oil-low light illuminated. We were beginning to wonder what other strange things could happen. The pilot reduced power on the left engine and the oil pressure stayed within limits.

We had discussed the fact that the glareshield would probably come down again on the trap. As it was hard for me to reach the glareshield and especially difficult to hold it up on a trap, I wasn't sure I could keep the glareshield from falling. We would be in a dangerous situation if we boltered with no attitude instruments. Now we were also worried about losing an engine.

Sure enough, the glareshield broke off on the trap, but the hook caught and we were safe on deck. Afterward, our crew discussed how serious this situation might have become. A night bolter with no instruments and an engine that could have failed at any time might have proved disastrous. Be ready for anything and carry tape with you! ◀

Ltjg. Laramie flies with VAQ-136.

I'm Famous

By LCdr. H.F. Bishop

After finishing an arduous combat cruise, it was a standard check in the block: instrument ground school. I had only been back a couple of months and hadn't been to the local instrument school for quite a while. The FAA representative came in to address the students, as he did every class.

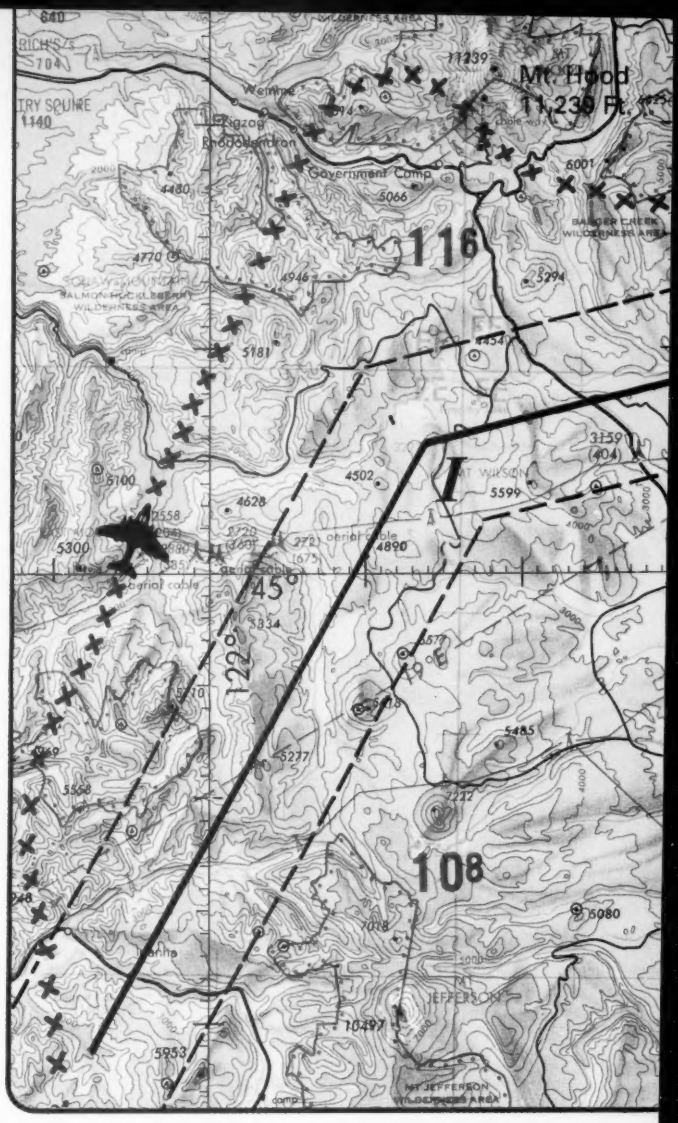
His first slide showed a computer printout of a local IFR low-level route. The route was drawn with a pen; the route boundaries four miles on either side of the route had been included. A computer-generated "X" with local time marked an aircraft's route. The class broke out in laughter. It was amazing: the dope had deviated off the route so far that he...that he...uh, oh. It looked awfully familiar; that's Portland, and that's Mount Hood...and I remember a couple of years ago...oh, no! I'm famous.

The FAA rep was kind, using words like "unprofessional" and "unbelievable" to describe this deviation, avoiding words like "idiot" and "stupid." If only he knew the whole story.

I had been a Cat II student in the FRS. I was getting ready to go to safety school and I needed one more flight before I could leave. This particular flight started out as a routine instrument route systems hop. My instructor was one of my old classmates. As we started the night low-level, my inertial nav system died. I looked over at my pilot and told him about the failure, saying that SOPs dictated that we abort the flight and return. He responded with, "OK, you get an 'above average' for SOP knowledge; now let's see if you can navigate by radar alone." That was non-standard, but I was a hacker. I could do it. Shortly after the third leg, we lost our last reliable heading reference. An inaccurate wet compass was all that remained. The same discussion about SOPs took place, but the pilot could see the terrain easily in the bright moonlight, so he again responded with, "Let's see how good you are."

About that time, we figured out how good I wasn't. During the discussion, I had lost track of time—very critical when flying time-distance-heading. We blew by the turnpoint. We turned over a lake that looked very similar (on radar) to our turnpoint. One small problem remained: there was a huge, lighted city on our nose, which wasn't supposed to be there. Where were we?

Well, we knew that we were west of the target, so we made a hard right turn. Suddenly, the moonlight wasn't there anymore. As we looked up for the moon, we came face to face with one of the most terrifying sights I had ever seen up to that point—we were in the incredibly awesome shadow of Mt. Hood. We had seconds to live.



We got back on course, and I'm alive to tell the story. Clouds that were not in the forecast, a little bit more off course... you can finish the story yourself.

It was on that flight that it finally sank home: SOPs are not advisory; they are mandatory. Only one man can waive an SOP, and that is the skipper. Even during combat in Iraq, we had to follow combat SOPs. (They were less restrictive than peacetime SOPs but they were, nonetheless, SOPs.) When the CO waives an SOP, his decision must be widely publicized and acknowledged so no other members of the squadron think that SOPs are being circumvented. If others think that SOPs only get lip service, then violations will occur.

Rules aren't made to be broken: they are made to help the idiots live a little longer. And all of us, at one time or another, can be idiots. ◀

LCdr. Bishop is a BN with VA-145.

My El Centro Excursion

By Ltjg. Dave Waterman

The 17th, the day of the accident, was no different than any other day at El Centro. We walked at approximately 1300. We walked early because we were carrying BDU-45 conicals with live electrical fuses in the hot label area.

On the way to the IP, my pilot gave a status call, saying his side was fine; I said I was busy fixing a squirrely system. We pushed at 1444, looking hard for the IP, as well as smoke on the target. I spotted the smoke at my one o'clock, and talked my pilot onto the area.

Approximately three miles from the target, we started the pop-up maneuver, turned 30 degrees to the right from our run-in heading of 143, counted five potatoes and started the pop. The master arm came on and the system was stepped into attack. We went inverted approximately 2,800 feet and apexed out at 3,400 feet. My pilot called that he had the target in sight as we rolled out in the 10-degree dive. We pickled at 1,350 feet and 450 knots and started a climb. I saw a positive indication on the VSI, safed the master arm, and looked back trying to spot the hit.

As I was looking back to spot the hit, feeling the left turn, I started to come back into the cockpit when I heard a muffled thump, not unlike hearing a big garbage bag being popped in the room next to you. The next noise was just like hitting something with a car—whump! The following noise was just like an S-3 on approach—whoop-whoop! Then, I felt like I was hanging slightly in my harness, followed by a deceleration, with a rapid rolling sensation to the left. As I brought my head around to see what my pilot was doing I remember thinking distinctly that something was not right and that it was getting ugly. I looked left to find I was staring at my pilot's back as it looked like he was trying to push the stick into the instrument panel. (We had had a total hydraulic failure, and he was trying to regain control of a dead stick.) I then looked forward out of the plane and found us passing through the inverted, in a snap left roll.

After that, time became real fuzzy. I remember a loud explosion; whether it was the aircraft, or the pilot's ejection seat I don't know. (Later, the crew in the plane that had observed the mishap said that our entire plane was engulfed in a fireball).

The cockpit was filled with plexiglass, dust and noise. I remember looking left out of the corner of my eye and seeing boots. I started to grab the lower handle, but I paused and waited until the aircraft was on the upswing (which wasn't very long). Something I remember very clearly was telling myself to get pointed up instead of down. I remember reaching for the handle, but I don't remember touching the handle. I'm pretty sure it was a one-handed-snag-and-pull-for-your-life maneuver.

Then I remember swinging slightly in my chute. I "woke up" yelling in my chute. All the automatic seat-man separation equipment had worked and I had a safe, full chute. I stopped yelling because I thought I was blinded. A quick reality check told me that my oxygen mask was covering my eyes. I swatted at it and my mask and helmet fell into place. (My mask and dual-visored helmet had been pushed back on my head.)

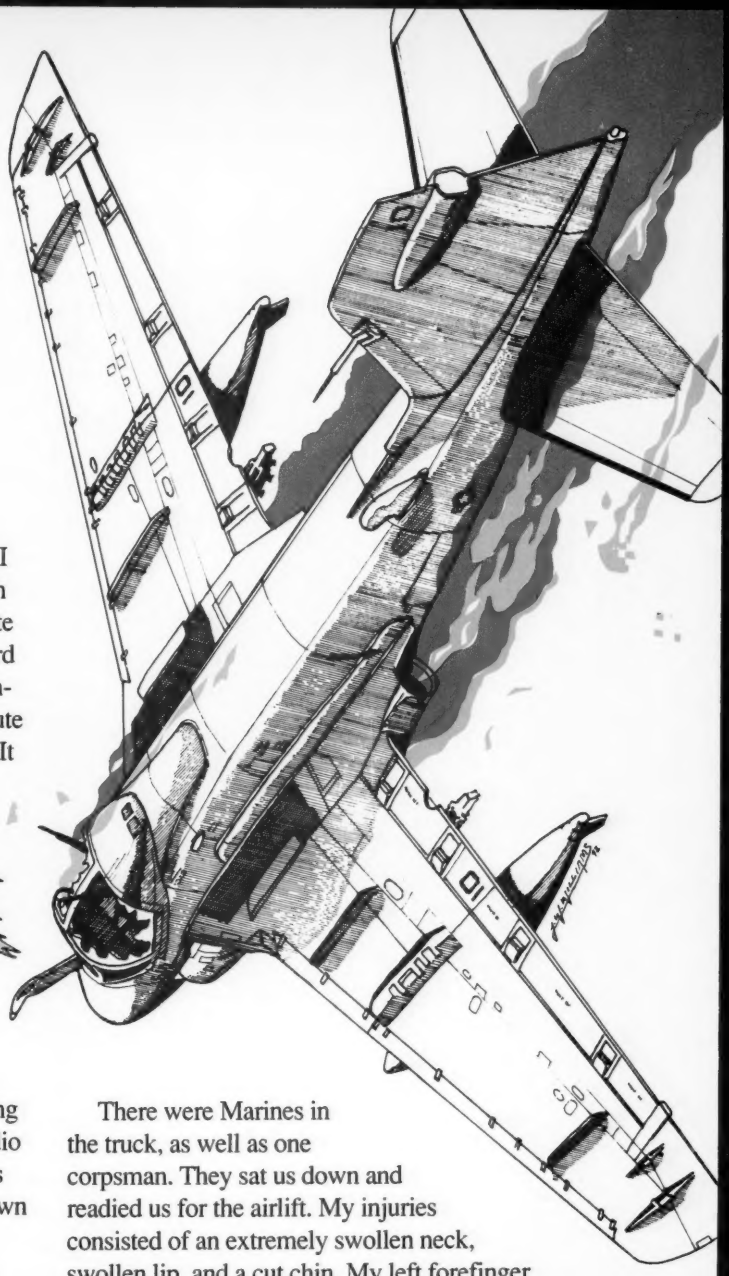
I looked up into my chute to check it, and then tried to release the contents of my seat pan. My left arm was giving me trouble so I used my right arm to release the pan. I watched the raft fall away and inflate. I must have been higher than 3,000 feet as I had well over a minute of chute time.

I rested my arms by grasping the risers for a few seconds until the four-line release handles caught my eye. I grabbed the right one and pulled, and I went a little to the right. I grabbed the left one, tugged left and I went left. I steered myself back and forth, aiming for a big bush that looked like it might cushion my fall. As I neared the ground, I flared the chute and it slowed a little. I braced just like they taught us in P'cola. I hit the bush with my feet, fell to my left, hitting my knees. Then I hit my waist, back and helmet.

I was half in, half out of the bush, which was only about two feet tall. My raft was about two or three feet to my right, the chute collapsed behind me. I lay there for a while , then unbuckled my chute's koch fittings and got up. I remember walking three complete circles around the bush. I don't know why. I then heard the circling jet overhead, really the first noise I remember. I took off my helmet and started to spread my chute out so that the white-and-orange would show clearly. It looked as if the circling aircraft hadn't seen me, so I located one of my smoke flares and set it off. After that, I was sure that they had seen me, so I started looking for my pilot.

I couldn't see him. I got out my radio. I tried several times with no luck, and then remembered to shut down my emergency transponder. I turned the radio back on in time to hear my pilot talking to the circling aircraft. I called to my pilot over the radio and he answered, talking me onto his position. He was only about 100 meters away or so. We stayed at our own little sites until I discovered blood on my glove after wiping my face. I was cut under my chin somewhere and I couldn't tell where or how badly I was bleeding, so I called to him to come over and check me out.

He came over and said it was just cut, but as he was looking at my chin, I noticed that the back of his flight suit was bloody. I went around him and noticed a gash to the right of his back bone on his neck. I asked if he felt anything, and he said his neck was sore. He sat down and I was looking through the seat pan for the first-aid kit, when he called out that a truck was coming. I popped my second smoke so the truck could find us easily.



There were Marines in the truck, as well as one corpsman. They sat us down and readied us for the airlift. My injuries consisted of an extremely swollen neck, swollen lip, and a cut chin. My left forefinger was stiff and I couldn't move it, and my ribs were extremely tender. My neck and back were sore and stiff, my left leg was hyperextended, my left elbow felt broken (it was just sprained), and I was definitely in shock. Most of my injuries were on my left side and my pilot's injuries were on his right.

We might have hit the canopy bow when we ejected. My left boot was sliced to the steel toe, probably from the AMAC panel. If I hadn't been wearing steel toes, I would have at least three less toes today. ◄

Ltjg. Waterman is a BN with VA-95.

"I Thought You Had the Controls!"

By Lt. David D. Diamond

During the brief, I always say, "Whenever we change controls, we'll have a three-way positive change of controls. Emphasize the word 'controls.' Make sure the other pilot has the controls before you release them and then show your hands on the glareshield." Some people may think this method is extreme; however, after reading my story, you'll understand.

It was a busy day at the OLF and I was playing the part of conehead student as my on-wing was doing his best to teach me how to do touch-and-goes in the T-34C. I had just finished one of my classic flat landings and my on-wing had taken the controls to critique my performance on downwind. He explained how the T-34C was not built to be landed nosewheel first and how I ought to try using the novel concept he called the flare. Suddenly, we got a call from the RDO telling us we had traffic at the 90. I answered the RDO, saying "I have the aircraft". About this time, my instructor got quiet; I thought he was going to demonstrate this flare thing he kept talking about.

The aircraft continued straight and level for a few seconds, before slowly turning to cross the field about halfway up the runway. I was wondering what the IP was doing, when he asked over the ICS, "Where are you going?"

"I'm not doing anything," I replied, "you have the flight controls." That was the first and only time I ever heard him scream.

"I *don't* have the controls!" he yelled.

"*I've* got the controls," we both called.

After our hearts began pumping again, we discussed what had happened. When I made the traffic call to the RDO, the IP thought I had taken control of the aircraft. From that day, I've always used the word "controls" to pass control of the aircraft.

The hands-on-the-glareshield routine came about while I was learning to fly TH-57s. Many of the instructors made you show your hands on the glareshield after switching controls. I always thought it was a stupid habit. I was sitting right next to the guy and my flight controls were in his peripheral vision; it was obvious I had let go of the controls. I became a convert on the night we lost ICS while flying GCAs.

My instructor was in the middle of a GCA when his ICS and radio receiver failed. I noticed he seemed distracted. He looked at me and tapped his hand on the glareshield. He was one of the instructors who had made me use the glareshield routine and I figured he wanted me to take the controls.

My instructor tapped his helmet and gave me a thumbs down. I told control we had radio problems and were headed home. Until that point, I hadn't realized how hard it is to communicate without an ICS, especially at night. A hand signal is only useful if the other pilot can figure out its meaning. Hands on the glareshield has always been associated with a change of controls, so when he gave that signal I was able to figure out what he wanted.

During flight operations there is always plenty of opportunity for miscommunication and a breakdown in crew coordination. By adding a couple of seconds to my brief, I've helped keep confusion down and helped make things safer if I lose ICS. ◀

Lt. Diamond flies H-2s with HSL-34.

Small FOD, Big Problem

By Lt. Michael Ciardello

Have you ever had one of those days when everything goes wrong and you don't think you'll ever get airborne? It was a gray, winter day, with the winds gusting past 40 knots. The ODO had canceled the day flights because of the high winds. I was fairly confident that my night FCLP hop would not go. I started to plan what I would do that night. As luck would have it, the winds died down a little (to 35 knots) and the bounce was on.

No sweat, standard FCLP brief and head down to maintenance control. What was that? All of the dailies have expired except ours? Well, at least we can walk. Oh great, my torso zipper just broke. A quick FOD walkdown around the plane, a trip to the PR shop and we'd be on our way.

We made it to the hold-short and I began to think we might get this flight out after all. After all the hassles getting this far, I hoped that the rest of the event would be routine. The fun, however, was just beginning.

Right after rotation, we flew through the roughest turbulence I had ever experienced that close to the ground. I decided that if we hit the turbulence again during our CCA we would make a full stop. We climbed to 3,000 feet, went into a 30-degree bank and started our turn to 330 degrees. The pilot rolled out on 360 and asked me what the new heading was. I told him 330 and we started turning again. As we passed through 330 I looked over at him and saw him repeatedly slamming the stick over to the right as the plane increased its left bank. His next words still increase my heart rate: "I can't level the wings!"

Every time he moved the stick, our left angle of bank increased, as well as our rate of descent. I gave a quick call to Approach declaring an emergency and telling them that the aircraft was out of control. They acknowledged my emergency and called traffic for me. By this point, I had completely lost my sense of humor, and repeated that we were out of control and could not avoid traffic.

We were now stuck in a 60-degree left bank and were still losing altitude. The pilot held the stick as far as to the right as it would go with full rudder, but could only hold our current AOB.

Passing through about 1,500 feet AGL, my pilot told me that he still did not have control and it was time to get out. I took one last look outside (wondering where the plane would crash), then inside, when I noticed that we had finally broken the rate of descent. Reaching across, I put my hand on his shoulder and told him we should stay with it a little longer. Thinking back, this idea was pretty stupid, considering the canopy bow in the EA-6B and a pilot who was prepared to initiate command ejection.

We climbed up to 3,500 feet and caught our breath, still in a 60-degree bank. The pilot gave the stick one last shot at going to the right and broke it free enough to level the wings. The stick now had about one inch of right throw available (past that point he could feel it binding). We had Approach set us up for a straight-in, which, with our turning ability, ended up being about 15 miles. We trapped, after which we lost that one inch of right throw that we had for the approach. After maintenance tore the plane apart, they found a fastener that had become lodged in the flaperons, which had jammed the flight controls. One small piece of FOD almost turned a "routine" FCLP hop into a class-A mishap. ◀

Lt. Ciardello flies with VAQ-129.

"Roger That Emergency; You're No.4..."

By Lt. Bob Wetzel

We had been flying nearly every day for a month; our proficiency on this det was at its highest level. This particular flight included a three-hour transit to the op area off the northern coast of Corsica.

We descended to our on-station point and prepared to shut down the No.1 engine to conserve fuel—a common practice. Suddenly, the No.1 prop's rpm began surging from 100 to 100.8 percent. The flight engineer immediately energized the prop-synchronizing system and the prop readings returned to normal.

Everything was fine for the next couple of hours and I decided it was time to hop into the left seat. Almost immediately, the No.1 prop again acted up. The prop was now at 105.5 percent! We saw wild shaft-horsepower readings—zero to negative. We analyzed the readings and determined that the propeller had pitchlocked. In this situation, we couldn't secure the engine with the emergency shutdown handle.

We went through the NATOPS procedures for a pitchlocked propeller and started to restart the No.4 engine. After we got No.4 restarted we climbed.

Since we now had a couple of minutes, we collected ourselves and reviewed all the NATOPS procedures. It was funny, but we all commented on how the scenario was exactly like the ones we had seen in the FRS, the ones we said would *never* happen to us.

We were just beginning to relax when we heard a loud bang. All the engine instruments showed that the No.1 prop had decoupled. I looked at my engineer and copilot in disbelief. We began NATOPS procedures and declared an emergency with ATC.

Because of the windmilling prop, we would have to make the return transit at a very slow airspeed; returning to our home base was out of the question. We decided the best choice was Naples, about an hour away. We relayed our request to ATC and continued to climb.

As we began to relax again, the No.1 and No.2 propeller pump lights came on for the No.1 engine, indicating a massive leak of propeller-controlling fluid. My copilot looked out his window and confirmed our fears, noting fluid streaming out of the No.1 prop. We wondered how much worse the situation would get.

We were lucky to have a pilot on our crew who had actually lost a prop in a similar situation. His experience provided valuable insight. We went through the NATOPS manual and talked about every incident we could recall.

With the prop pump lights now flickering on and off, we decided it was time to start thinking about the possibility of ditching. We began to prepare ourselves and the cabin. As we approached the coastline, I called ATC, who promptly told me I was *number eight* for the approach. We couldn't believe it! We were handed off to no less than *five* different controllers. Each time we had to re-declare our emergency and the necessity to land immediately.

Our prop and engine indications had stabilized and we thought we were looking pretty good. Finally, we were handed off to the approach controller (again, I had to declare an emergency for him).

"Roger your situation. You will be No.4; expect to land *on the hour*." That was *45 minutes away!* Again, we stressed our predicament to him.

"Yes, sir," he replied, "understand, you will be No.4." We tried once more to convey the seriousness of our situation.

"We are declaring an *emergency*, " I said. "We are coming in to land!" The controller finally understood the word "emergency" (imagine that!) and cleared us for an immediate landing.

Because of the confusion, we were still up at altitude, in close to the field. The real trick then became to descend and to keep the airspeed down to avoid spinning the prop too fast. At one point, the prop went to the limit on the rpm gauge.

On final, we started feeling we were through the worst; we weren't. As we maneuvered for final, the horsepower indicators began fluctuating positive and negative, indicating that the propeller had either never decoupled or had recoupled itself in flight, which as any self-respecting P-3 pilot or engineer will tell you is a technical impossibility. We were dumbfounded.

Because we were high and the power was fluctuating erratically, we broke off the approach and circled as we figured out what to do. Again, using NATOPS as a guide, we quickly surmised that the prop was still connected. We decided to go ahead with shutdown procedures. After shutting down, we again set up for final.

Since none of us had ever landed with a windmilling prop, we knew we were in for some excitement on the rollout. The approach and landing were textbook. As the nosewheel lowered to the deck, the plane swerved dramatically to the left; we countered with aileron and rudder.

We realized that this combination wasn't enough, however, and started to bring the power up on No.4 engine. We went to full rudder and full aileron to maintain centerline, eventually stopping 8,600 feet down the runway, which was *8,661 feet long*.

The time from the first sign of trouble to shutdown was one-and-a-half hours. As we sat in our BOQ room later, we all reflected on what we had experienced and what we had learned. First, there is *no* replacement for sound knowledge of systems and NATOPS procedures. We all commented on how, as students, we all balked at having to memorize certain items, saying that if we ever got ourselves into a sticky situation, we would just pull out the book. Well, it couldn't have gotten any stickier and having all that knowledge really helped.

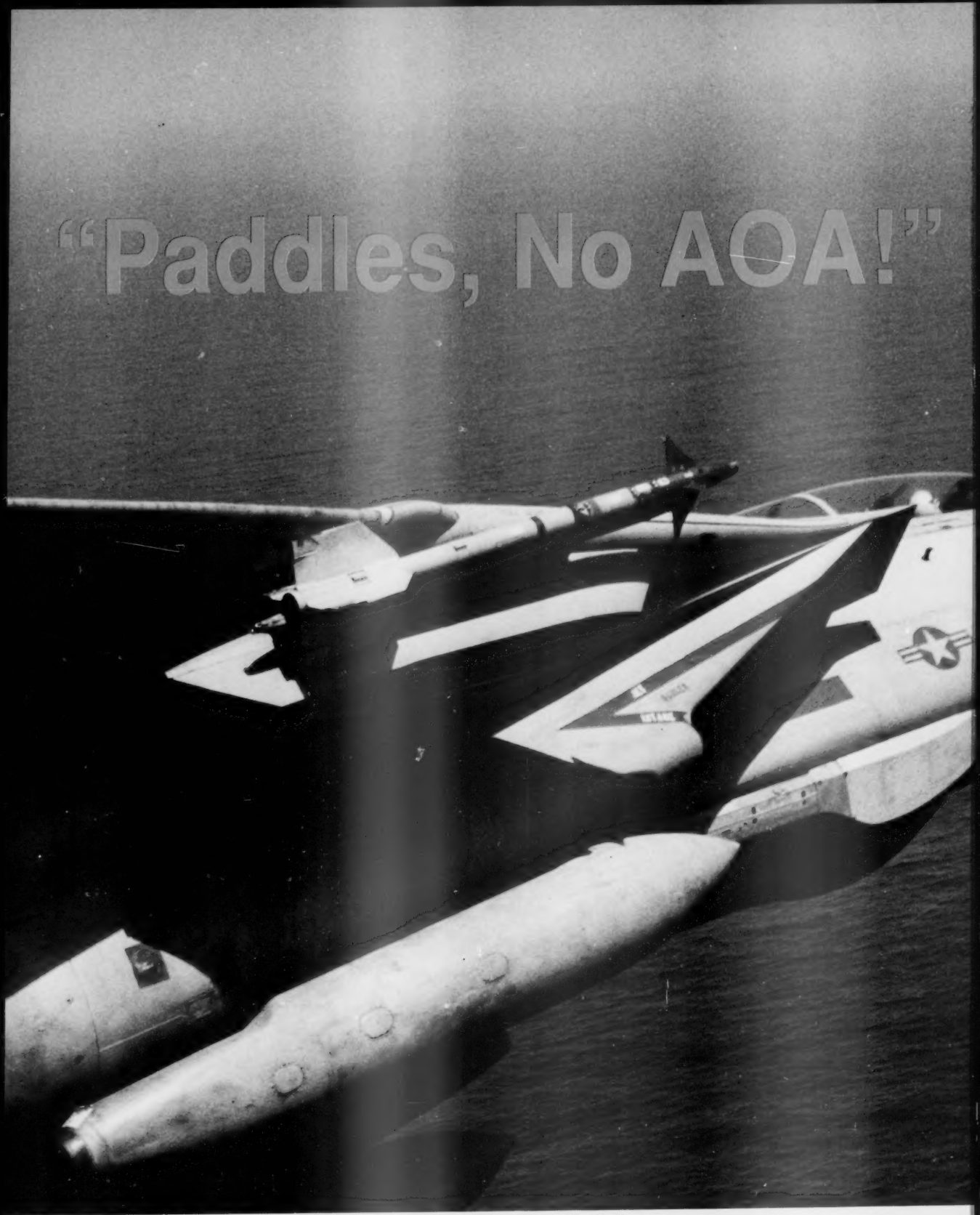
Second, we realized that no matter how good our training was and no matter how hard we tried to train true to life, an emergency is something that you'll never be fully prepared for. All the more reason to have that data base of knowledge.

Third, never accept less than what you need from ATC. We all agreed that coordination with a foreign ATC facility is challenging. During an emergency, you need to be alert. ◀

Lt. Wetzel is a P-3 pilot with VP-49.

**Postflight maintenance and subsequent engineering investigation revealed a stripped pitch-lock ring and a failed front-end bearing that caused instrument indications to constantly vary. These variations were inconsistent with any emergency covered in NATOPS. — Ed.*

"Paddles, No AOA!"



By LCdr. Ward Carroll

Ah, the pleasures of being a fleet RIO. My first hop off the boat in 11 days and I got to go at night. I wasn't about to balk at the chance, though. It was getting close to the end of the quarter and OPTAR was tight. With the shakedown cruise for a brand-new CVN quickly becoming as tedious as REFTRA, any flight was a good one. I was flying with the skipper on an AIC mission; there was no moon, but plenty of stars.

All the players in the three-plane go were veterans of our recent Persian Gulf deployment, so the brief was relaxed, even jovial—too jovial, we'd discover. Everyone in the flight (except me) had just recovered from an earlier event, and the basics were quickly covered so those interested could get some chow before the flight.

LCdr. Tom Prochilo

By the time we walked, all I really knew or cared about was that I was going flying and continuing in the race for "most traps" on the six-week shindig.

As we checked in with Strike and got set up for the intercepts, I remembered how much I hate the awkwardness of getting back in the saddle. The jerky, "Let's see, what comes next?" method with which I made my way around the cockpit was frustrating considering two weeks earlier I had been at the top of my game, flying twice a day. I resolved to relax and simply work through it. After all, I was with the skipper; he'd take up the slack. What's the adage? "If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right."

Because it was the last cycle and we'd have plenty of gas, we had briefed exploiting some of the weapons system's capabilities that we didn't normally use on a benign AIC hop. I worked diligently during the first run, trying to ensure my switchology was correct. By the time we were eight miles from our opponents, I was satisfied that I had a lock on one of them and a simulated missile in the air.

The skipper got a tally, and commented that the bogey I had locked appeared co-altitude. We pressed in for a few more miles until the skipper was convinced of the mid-air potential and bunted the nose. We passed our squadronmates in the other Tomcat, less than 500 feet directly below.

"I didn't like that," the skipper sternly quipped on base freq, hoping the other crew would get the hint and get to their prebriefed altitude. I looked at our altimeter, for the first time actually absorbing the value on this hop, and read 22K. I casually referenced my kneeboard card and noticed 20K scribed next to the skipper's callsign and my asterisk (the salty way I designate myself). The third jet was slated for 22K.

"Ah, skipper, we're supposed to be to be at 20,000 feet," I said. We both swallowed our pride as the Tomcat drove back down to 20K. I reprimanded myself for not catching the mistake at the beginning of the run instead of after scaring ourselves by trying to occupy the same piece of sky as Dash 3.

Alright, my blood was pumping again. I was back on the step.

Several ROT-testing, cutting-edge runs later, we were all in marshal readying for the approach-and-trap phase.

The skipper and I had the dubious honor of being the "sacrificial lamb"—going down the chute first. That either meant we'd be first to 'rats, or the first to press a foul deck and take a trip around the penalty box.

Our racetrack gameplan worked 4.0 and we commenced at the fix, on time. Once close to the BRC, we received good bullseye. At eight miles, we went through

PH1 Mark M. Therien

the landing checks and started to slow to on-speed. Approach locked on with the PALS, dropped lock and then reacquired. At this point, confusion allied with our single-minded determination to get aboard on the first pass and set the stage for ugliness.

Our calculated airspeed at max trap was 140 knots, but when we slowed to that, the indexer showed a full slow and AOA read about 17 units. The skipper verified wings were 20 degrees and Auto, and that he had no other lights. (He later told me he'd had a flap light during the transition, but it went out with master reset and never relit.) I noticed my standby gyro in a 15-degree, nose-up attitude and told the skipper, along with my gut feeling we were slow.

"What do you think the problem is," I asked, "AOA or airspeed?"

"You tell me..." the skipper said. No warning lights and no horizon. We quickly confirmed our max-trap calculations.

"Tell Paddles 'no AOA,'" the CO said. I wasn't convinced of the diagnosis, but yielded to his experience. We pressed in.

"107, on and on," the LSO called. "Three-quarters of a mile, call the ball."

"107, Tomcat, ball, no AOA."

"Roger, ball, no AOA. You're slow." The skipper tweaked the power. "You're slow." Another nudge forward on the throttles. "You're on-speed." I looked at the airspeed gauge. We were accelerating to 155 knots! I noted a solid doughnut over the skipper's shoulder and reasoned the airspeed indicators were incorrect, reading about 10 or 15 knots over our actual speed. On the other hand, the skipper remained convinced the AOA was screwed up and 155 knots was "too hot" to land, so he walked the jet back toward 140 knots as I called the decel.

The dreaded "Power!" calls came as the Tomcat dropped onto the deck a few feet before the 1-wire. There was little doubt which CDP we had snagged as we performed the "taxi of shame" up the angle to clear the landing area. As we got in position to de-arm, the skipper noticed the wings wouldn't move. We told tower we were stiff-wing and moved to a spot on the bow where we could do some troubleshooting. After trying all the tricks, the wings wouldn't budge so we left them at 20 degrees and shut down.

The skipper and I traveled the length of the ship on the 03 level trying to figure out what had happened. The only thing we were convinced of was the approach felt really weird. All questions were answered as we entered Maintenance Control.

"Did you know ya'll landed with your aux flaps up?" the master chief inquired. "We saw it as you rolled out on the PLAT, plain as day."

Bingo! The clues continued to roll in as the AEs reported the aux-flap control circuitbreaker had popped, which also explained why the wings refused to sweep aft after the trap. But why no 10-second flap light? No answer.

We had an emergency, but didn't know it. More accurately, we had ignored the evidence the jet gave us. We had no reason to believe either the airspeed or AOA systems had failed, yet we convinced ourselves of exactly that. Our real on-speed with DLC engaged and the aux flaps up was 146 knots. Combined with a slight error on a gauge and the fact that the 21-degree switch logic is removed with the aux-flap breaker out, this setup allowed the wings to crack a few degrees back while still reading 20 and auto, which accounted for the 150 knot-plus speed after the ball call. No wonder the Tomcat sank like a rock at the ramp!

The reasonable man has got to be able to step into the equation, even after the blinders required for a night trap are on. We had plenty of gas; there was no pressure. We should have done a low approach over the platform, gotten a visual check from the LSOs or the Boss, and given ourselves some time in the bolter pattern to—among other things—break out the flashlights and check the circuitbreaker panels. As it was, we flirted with a cut pass (or worse) and a two-blocked arresting wire. ◀

LCdr. Carroll is a RIO with VF-143. He is also a former *Approach* editor.

BRAVO ZULU

Left to right: AW3 P.J. Vietti, Lt. Rob Nickel, Ltjg. Rick Nelson

Lt. Rob Nickel
Ltjg. Rick Nelson
AW3 P.J. Vietti
HSL-32

During the visual identification of a merchant vessel 28 miles from their ship, USS *Wainwright* (CG 28), the crew of Invader 141 saw the oil-pressure caution light illuminate for a speed decreaser. Ltjg. Nelson (copilot) immediately leveled the wings and began to climb from 100 feet, avoiding rapid power changes. Lt. Nickel (HAC) pulled out his NATOPS checklist and went through the action items.

After completing the steps and not seeing any secondary indications, the HAC asked for the ship to immediately close the helicopter's position and set emergency flight quarters.

Lt. Nickel then assumed control and told AW3 Vietti (aircrewman) to inspect the area around the No.2 engine. AW3 Vietti reported that oil was pouring out of the engine cowling and along the side of the aircraft. At this time, the No.2 engine's oil-pressure light came on, which was rapidly followed by a No.2 engine chip light and a torque surge. Complying with NATOPS, the HAC called for his copilot to secure the No.2 engine. Ltjg. Nelson confirmed the correct ECL and shut the engine down.

In an effort to reduce their aircraft's gross weight, the crew tried to dump internal fuel but couldn't because the fuel-dump valve had failed. They told the det OIC of their fuel state, and the OIC directed the crew to divert to USS *John F. Kennedy* (CV 67), 15 miles away. The HAC turned toward JFK, while AW3 Vietti provided range and bearing information to the carrier.

When he was in range, the copilot told the Air Boss about the situation. After the H-2 entered the pattern, *Kennedy's* Air Boss asked how much fuel the Seasprite had in the aux tanks. The crew replied that the tanks were half full. The Air Boss told the crew to "lose the tanks."

Meanwhile, Lt. Nickel had made several power checks while *Kennedy* maneuvered for best winds. Once on BRC, with winds down the angle at 25 knots, the HAC started his approach. With his copilot calling out airspeeds and torque, Lt. Nickel made a smooth no-hover landing just forward of the 4-wire.

Investigation of the No.2 engine showed that a snubber fitting on the speed decreaser's gearbox had blown out of the gearbox with the pressure line attached. As a result, the No.2 engine lost all of its oil and had begun to deteriorate in flight. ◀

LCdr. Eli Hertz
VFA-106

Seconds after selecting full afterburner on both engines at the start of his takeoff roll, LCdr. Hertz heard a thump, and felt his Hornet shudder as it began to decelerate.

He heard several aural cautions, including "Engine left," followed by "Engine right" and "Bleed air left."

Besides having multiple emergencies, including engine fire and having to abort the takeoff, LCdr. Hertz also faced a brake failure.

He secured the left engine and brought the right throttle to idle to maintain hydraulic pressure. He selected emergency brakes and brought the aircraft, now engulfed in flames, to a stop. After securing the right engine, he opened the canopy and climbed out.

An analysis revealed that the catastrophic failure of the right engine first-stage fan disk had not only caused the right engine to disintegrate, but had also severed numerous fuel, hydraulic and bleed-air lines on the left engine. ◀

Maj. R.M. Pryor, USMC
VFA-106

During a low-level training mission in southern Georgia, Maj. Pryor heard his backseater call, "Bird!" Almost immediately, the Hornet's canopy exploded as a large bird hit it.

The forward half of the F/A-18D's canopy was completely demolished, and large chunks of plexiglass flew aft, puncturing both vertical stabs and hitting the pilot in the rear seat. The debris also severed communications between the two crewmen.

Maj. Pryor feared the worst for his backseater (who was later found to have only a minor cut). He slowed the aircraft while checking controllability and decided to divert to Moody AFB (the nearest suitable divert) where he made a straight-in approach and landed. ◀

By Lt. Jerry Stokes

Rendezvous By Braille

Lt. Steve Whitaker

"Marshal, 602, see you at 10," my copilot transmitted as we looked down through the soot and smoke of the Persian Gulf sky at our carrier. Switching up button six, we continued to search the overhead stack for the other aircraft listed on the air plan for the mid-afternoon recovery. I was a nugget 2P with four months of cruise time under my belt; it had been at least a week since my last no-grade, and I was finally feeling comfortable flying around the boat. Flying a day recovery was a nice change of pace after chasing the final bearing through hazy layers of oil smoke night after night for as long as I could remember.

A section of Tomcats appeared beneath our nose in a shallow turn and we could make out a couple of Hornets up high coming off an orbiting tanker. The Prowlers and Intruders were established below us when we checked in and were now boring circles in anticipation of a clear deck. We had everyone in sight now, except for a single Viking scheduled to return on this recovery.

My copilot began reading off the approach checklist as I toggled switches and double-checked gauges. With some effort, I added the values displayed on the two fuel-quantity indicators and calculated the amount of JP-5 we would have to dump to arrive on the ball with 3,600 pounds. Still no sign of the S-3. I figured the Hoover was going to be late and would have to recover after us. It'd be nice not to recover dead last for once.

A short time later, I glanced up to the overhead console to check the lighting switches and noticed a single aircraft in the distance approaching at our altitude. The more-than-ample empennage made it immediately apparent that the jet was the Viking that we'd been looking for.

Below us, the deck was moving slowly. A train of pointy nosed fighters was winding its way toward the bow while a small traffic jam formed aft of the waist cats. It would be a while before we'd descend for the initial.

The Viking was now visible at our 8 o'clock, well aft of our bearing line in a shallow turn. I reached down beside my seat to secure my helmet bag then looked once more to the left to check the Hoover. The S-3 had moved up on our bearing line and was continuing to close the distance between us.

By now, my copilot, a second tour CAPC, was becoming increasingly interested in the steadily approaching jet. I could just make out the two white helmets reflecting sunlight through the heavily tinted canopy. The Viking continued to close on our bearing line in what appeared to be a textbook rendezvous.

I thought to myself, "This guy should have briefed something ahead of time if he wanted to fly form." Then, as I continued to stare, I wondered if the S-3 was lost comm or needed our help with something.

My copilot and I could now clearly distinguish the heads of the pilot and COTAC through the Hoover's canopy. As I looked closer, expecting to see the pilot's visor locked on to our Hummer, I felt a cold chill run down my spine as I saw instead the back of one helmet and the top of the other. The COTAC had his head down looking at the floor of the aircraft and the pilot was looking away from us hawking the boat!

I stared in disbelief as my copilot broke the silence with, "You'd better do something." As I checked the ditching hatch for traffic above, I disengaged the autopilot with my thumb and pulled back on the yoke to allow the S-3 to underrun. The Hoover disappeared beneath us then emerged from under our nose to the outside of the turn. Only after the sinister shadow of our dome flicked across the canopy did the pilot in the S-3 take separation.

Back on the boat after the recovery I received a phone call from the pilot of the S-3. Indeed, neither he nor his COTAC had seen our E-2 until they had gone beneath us. Had I not seen the Viking and climbed to avoid it, our aircraft would have collided.

I learned a valuable lesson that day. I let myself become more than "comfortable flying around the boat"; I'd been lulled by the routine. I should have recognized the dangerous situation much sooner and reacted before the guy in the right seat had to speak up. Assuming that the other guy sees you is always a bad bet. ◀

Lt. Stokes is an LSO with VAW-112.

Harry Burns

Push! Push! Descend! Descend!

By Lt. Paul Lumsden

When I arrived at my first fleet squadron, I was anxious to display my aviator skills as a driver of the "four-man electric van." I was sure that thorough briefs and an aggressive attitude in the air would let me make a name for myself from the get-go. Sometimes, fate deals a different hand and all you have time to do is react.

Halfway through workups, our crew was scheduled for another night strike. Everyone knows that night strikes always provide a little extra pucker factor, not the least of which is the recovery.

After putting the Prowler through its paces following a precise nav track and a timed-to-the-second HARM shot, we were headed back to the field. As we approached the initial on this clear, moonless night, there seemed to be a swarm of red fireflies hovering over the base. We had given the standard quick-and-dirty brief on lookout doctrine, so I was sure we could make it through the break, pattern and recovery without cutting anyone out.

We switched to tower frequency to report the initial. We heard what amounted to effective comm jamming as landing clearances, reporting numbers, confirming intervals all created a steady stream of chatter. Somehow, we slipped in our calls and headed to the break.

Just as I was about to roll the aircraft, an aircraft appeared from below and to our left. It was definitely climbing toward our aircraft. All I had time to do was unload slightly, since it was now obvious that the F/A-18 was in front of us. We were so close that I could easily see the iridescent glow from the cockpit lights reflecting off the pilot's helmet as his Hornet filled our windscreen.

After ECMO 1 and I shouted a few expletives, I turned downwind and landed. During our debrief, we all wondered why we hadn't seen the other aircraft. As we passed over the numbers, I was sure I had cleared the area for anyone on the roll or doing a touch-and-go. Also, none of us had heard anything on the radio. Although I chalked it up to a rare close call, I promised myself to elaborate on lookout doctrine in my briefs.

The next night's schedule was a carbon copy of the first. Same time, same crew, same exercise. This time, however, we headed toward the air station for some

We were so close that I could easily see the iridescent glow from the cockpit lights reflecting off the pilot's helmet as his Hornet filled our windscreen.

Cdr. John Leenhouts

practice tanking from a KA-6. As I rendezvoused on the "UFO," I realized that everyone else had the same idea. I was No. 3 in line, and as I waited my turn and concentrated on flying form off the lights to my right, ECMO 3 (sitting right behind me) kept a lookout on the left as we had briefed.

After a few minutes, ECMO 3 told me that there was a plane joining on us. I told him to keep an eye on it and he replied, "Looks like he's joining up now."

A few heartbeats later, the ECMO yelled, "Push! Push! Descend! Descend!" I unloaded without hesitation. We hung in our straps for a few seconds and I looked left to see the perfect planform of another F/A-18 wrapped up, belly up, trying to arrest his closure rate.

Another heartbeat later, I watched as the Hornet passed above us into the airspace we had just vacated. We shouted the same endearments as the night before.

I often wonder what would have happened that second night if I had not had the extra set of eyeballs helping me out. ◀

Lt. Lumsden flies EA-6Bs with VAQ-137.

By Lt. Tom Schrantz

Nose Low, Accelerating?

Three months into a summer Med cruise my RIO and I manned up for a 1 v 1 ACM hop with a squadronmate over the Adriatic. We were both first-cruise guys while the crew of the other Tomcat had a second-cruise pilot with the XO in his back seat. Our brief was thorough, covering training rules, stalls and spins, and nose low, accelerating. With a one-hour cycle, we were all looking forward to some good training.

After a couple of AIC runs, we had burned down to fighting weight. With a "fights on" call, I felt the fangs coming out as we approached the merge. As the fight progressed, I found myself slow and defensive approaching 11,000 feet. Someone called, "Knock it off," but I had already maneuvered to get out of plane. My Tomcat had other plans, however, and pitched 90 degrees nose down.

Passing 10,000 feet, we heard our wingman call, "Watch your altitude, get your nose up!" We were below 200 knots as I went to MIL and set 17 units AOA. My RIO called off airspeed and altitude as the calls from the other aircraft continued: "Get your nose up!" Airspeed rapidly increased, and the horizon finally began to fill the windscreen as I maintained 17 units. We bottomed out at 3,500 feet, climbed back to altitude and took a deep breath as we discussed what had just happened.

Everyone always talks about nose-low acceleration. Idle, boards, pull to the nearest horizon. What if you find yourself nose low, and slow? By going right to MIL and smoothly setting 17 units, it took us nearly 7,000 feet to recover. At 200 knots, it doesn't take much back-stick pressure to get 17 units, and any delay in going to MIL will cost valuable altitude. From now on, my briefs will always include nose low and slow.

PH3 D.W. Hanselman

Our crew coordination was good, but could have been better. In the debrief, I found out that my RIO didn't know I had initially departed. Any time the pilot departs, he should immediately tell the RIO to avoid any delay in crew coordination. Lastly, the hard deck exists for a reason. We were lucky it was a similar ACM hop and the hard deck was 10,000 feet. With a 5,000-foot hard deck, the caveat "no slow-speed, high-angle-of-attack maneuvering below 10,000 feet" are words that can be written in twisted metal and MIRs. ◄

Lt. Schrantz flies F-14Bs with VF-103.

Safety Article? What's There to Write About?

By Lt. Reid D. Carr

Yesterday, I made an error in judgment. I was talking to the maintenance officer about not having enough to do and about being caught up on all the things a det's MO lives for—paperwork, programs, monitors, requals.

He must have known what I was talking about because during the FOD walkdown this morning, he assigned me the monthly safety article. What a guy! What understanding, what compassion!

Later, while I was sitting in the shop, I heard the troops discussing the great weather. After three months of cold and rain in Norfolk, today was sunny and warm. Their discussion turned to liberty plans and how quickly we could do the required maintenance. With a little luck, we could start securing in time to enjoy the weather.

One guy mentioned that if two of them worked together, they could finish the dailies and turnarounds faster. One would do the outside and top, while the other did the inside and bottom. They never decided who would sign off the paperwork.

Another hard-charging sailor decided he would save time by working four gripes off with the same tool box. (We all know how long it takes to inventory tools after each job.) Meanwhile, I was still trying to come up with something to write quickly so I could hone my fishing skills before sundown. Maybe a walk around the hangar would cure my writer's block.

It was easy to see that everyone had a common goal: finish the day's work and get out to enjoy the first nice day in months.

I noticed that the aircraft were being put to bed quickly. There were only five people on one move. (Actually, there were 11 people on two moves, because one wingwalker was watching two helos at the same time.) I made a mental note to talk to QA about that later, but for now, I had to come up with an idea for that lousy safety article.

The last flight was home, and the aircraft was getting a top-off before going to the hangar. No goggles on the fuel crew, but they were just finishing; they were lucky nothing had happened that required the goggles. That bothered me, but not as much as having no idea for that article.

I walked around the corner of the hangar and was met by a large stream of water from the 14-day (?). The wash crew was obviously in a hurry, because instead of taking the time to check out the required safety goggles, they were using the goggles attached to their cranials. I was upset by the dousing, so I said something to them about paying attention to their surroundings.

The deadline was approaching for beating the notorious traffic, but I still didn't have an idea for the safety article. If I came up with something soon and got a little heavy on the gas pedal, I could still get in an hour of fishing before dark.

Just then, one of the maintenance chiefs came in to go through my 20-year bin looking for a part. That took 15 minutes, because the part he wanted took a while to find. I made a mental note to some day inventory that box, so I can find things when I need them. I definitely didn't have the time then because I had to get an idea for that lousy safety article.

I finally decided that there was no way I'd get this article done today. I just couldn't find anything to write about. Maybe the MO would let me slide for a day or two. Sooner or later, someone would do something that would warrant a safety article about them. ◀

Lt. Carr flies with HC-6.

When working on the flight deck
keep your head out of the clouds

or your body could join it.